

UPGRADING YOUR
ENTERPRISE SYSTEM
DOES IT MAKE SENSE?



INTRODUCTION

Successful professional services companies know they must stay up-to-date with the most current technology in order to be profitable. They realize that old technology can actually limit growth and can compromise the high quality service clients expect. Yet when the time comes to upgrade a firm's existing processing systems, many firms might decide to defer upgrading, especially in uncertain economic times. Why should your firm install an upgrade if there are so many variables and costs?

If you are an Elite Enterprise user, you may occasionally hear about upgrades to newer versions of Enterprise that are available to you. This white paper will explain in general the reasons why you might want to consider it.

TAKE A CLOSE LOOK AT YOUR CURRENT SYSTEM

It's natural to want to stick with the familiar. "Our software works fine," you might say. "It gets the job done. Once we start adding things, that's when things will get mucked up." In other words: "If it isn't broken, don't fix it."

But is your system really not "broken?" Once you look at what your system is lacking, you may find that your system is sorely lacking in the areas that are the most critical. These areas include customer relationship management to keep and manage your contacts and potential clients, financial and accounting to manage the incoming and outgoing resources, and document management for the storing of client records—just to name a few.

Clients are expecting more and more from their providers. They want more visibility into their cases, so products such as extranets to give clients a 24/7 look into their activities are going to be the norm. Clients are also demanding more flexibility in fee schedules, so firms need robust and versatile billing systems that can handle both fixed and hourly fees. Extreme mobility is here to stay, and eventually your clients are going to expect the accompanying perks to be included in the services they pay for.

The reality is that the world is becoming fully automated, with or without you. In the near future, you may be relying on your old solution, while competing firms are operating with platforms that are technologically years ahead of yours.

NOT UPGRADING: THE COST IS HIGHER THAN YOU MAY THINK

Some firms are still using paper forms and routing them around the office via inter-office or intra-office mail, or even manually moving the paper between the participants in the process. In this type of environment, many variables can affect the quality of data that is ultimately entered into the various systems such as loss of forms, non-legible handwriting, data entry errors, and partially completed forms. These inefficiencies and errors require time to correct, and time is money.

Often the process that is considered the "official" process is very different than the process that the employees are actually using. Many firms are using "generational stories" to pass along the business activities inside the firm, including approval processes and exceptions to the rules. In the past, an ad hoc approach has been used where each staff member would have the ability to send the forms to the appropriate user and even bypass approvals if speed was of the essence. Firms may not have enforced process security such as defining who can begin a process other than hiding the forms in a locked directory on the network. Many firms have never defined their business processes.

All of these small delays, data clarifications, and lack of structured processes quickly add up to big costs in staff hours and operating losses.

FUNCTIONALITY: THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS

We've all seen them: the presentations given by sales teams that show you the latest enhancements included in upgrades. On a PowerPoint slide, these enhancements may seem like endless minutiae. But when you put them into practice, you can see that these minor upgrades can significantly streamline operations.

In just one example, a substantial number of feature and usability advancements are available in the most recent versions of Enterprise, including Fixed/Capped Matter, Volume Discount, Client Cost Clearing Balancing Report, Tax Jurisdiction Tables, Manual General Journal Reversal, and Elite Global Release: Group Close and Switch Between Units, to name a few.

On paper it may appear that these are minor improvements. In reality, they save several manual steps for your billing department, check approval process, and global billing procedures. One single enhancement can provide your accounting department with automatic balance verifications so your staff can validate general ledger issues when they become apparent, rather than having to wait until the dreaded end-of-the-month balancing act. Security can be enhanced by adding fields that require approvals over a certain dollar amount so you no longer have to rely on your staff's manual maneuvers.

IMPROVEMENT AND STABILITY = LESS MAINTENANCE COSTS

Upgrades aren't just about additions—they're also about improvement and fixing issues that occurred in previous versions. At Elite, upgrades aren't arbitrarily developed in a vacuum. On the contrary, Elite listens to client suggestions. Your feedback is taken seriously and continually included in upgrade development. As a result, newer versions are more stable so you experience less down-time.

Because it costs Elite more to maintain an environment that supports older versions, clients who operate on older versions end up paying higher maintenance costs. Upgrading to a new version not only cuts down on your maintenance costs, more stable environments mean less time spent with maintenance.

UPGRADING GIVES YOU ACCESS TO NEW PRODUCTS

In addition, your system may not support the latest products that are vital to keeping your firm competitive. New products can give you astonishing versatility in reporting, for example, so that you can see into every department, from any viewpoint. New products can completely streamline and automate your procedures, provide you with powerful and versatile budgeting tools, or supply you with the latest global tools to effortlessly operate across borders.

A good example is automating business processes. Many firms are looking to the increasingly important task of business process management (BPM); in other words, managing how the firm's data gets approved and entered into the financial and practice management systems. All businesses have a process for getting core tasks completed, but the degree in which data quality control and automation are involved varies significantly, from paper, to partial automation, to ultimate, full automation utilizing the full range of BPM software capabilities. A full suite of these are available through the latest version of Elite Process Manager, but does your version support it?

If you don't have a current system, it may feel that you're hitting a wall every time you want to enhance your productivity by adding products. The first time it happens, it may not be that painful. The fourth or fifth time is when it really hurts—when you realize that your system is becoming more and more outdated and farther away from your ultimate goal: to help your firm be more profitable.

UPGRADES HELP YOU PREPARE FOR PROGRESS

In uncertain economic times, it's natural to want to retract spending and be cautious in expenditures. Certainly no one knows what the next year will bring, much less the next decade. But your operating system is as crucial to your firm's success as other resources, and as time goes on, it will become even more important. More and more processes will be moved to automation and technical processing, making your firm more dependent on a robust and fully functional system.

Electronic billing is one example. As clients become more and more dependent on electronic accounts payable systems, the more they're going to want law firms to fall into step. Does your firm's billing software have the capability to produce over 1200 different templates, like eBillingHub does?

After the economic upheaval of the past few years, it's almost a certainty that we are entering a period of more regulation. As a result of new laws, such as the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, firms are now finding that there needs to be an audit capability within the business processes, especially in the financial and accounting world, where auditors and managers are able to view and record the business practices going on in the firm. With a full BPM system, firms have their audit history available including data, attachments, and participants, and it gives them a fully documented control system for auditor review. Having the latest version with these capabilities can provide you with a secure and reliable system that ensures accurate audit procedures.

STRATEGIZING FOR FUTURE GROWTH AND GLOBAL FUNCTIONALITY

Think of your firm's future: will there be upcoming mergers or expansions? Is your firm exposed to more global operations? Even if your firm is strictly U.S. based, can you afford to ignore global features that include country-based requirements, multi-language and multi-currency benefits? Global processes and statutes are never static, and newer versions provide additional capabilities that can help you with international requirements that are constantly changing.

Enterprise has always provided users with multi-language and multi-currency capabilities, but with advanced versions the versions have added enhancements that streamline language and currency processes even more. For example, in 3.8, Global Release, users now have the ability to switch units from within Enterprise. The user no longer has to log out and back into the application to change units when entering data or reconciling across multiple units.

THE UPGRADE PROCESS IS PROVEN AND TIME TESTED

When a company determines that it is ready to upgrade, there may be many questions relating to the process. What really happens in an upgrade? What type of resources will be needed? Will the integrity of the firm's historical information—its data—be compromised?

Having a team behind you that knows your software, knows its history, and has extensive experience in upgrading is critical to a successful upgrade. Elite, for example, has created a team comprised of staff with decades of experience. This team follows a proven implementation process governed by the Elite Project Quality Model (PQM), a world-class approach based upon the internationally accepted, ANSI-standard principles from the Project Management Institute.

The Elite PQM serves as a roadmap for the entire implementation lifecycle, using a series of distinct but interrelated processes. During the implementation process, the Elite Project Team establishes a strong partnership with your firm, providing project management and technical expertise and guiding the firm through the intricacies of the implementation. Together with the client's project personnel, the Elite Project Team works diligently to ensure that the upgrade is successful.

Each upgrade is assigned a single project manager from Elite, who works across the entire Elite organization to manage communication. Other services groups will likely require clients to work across multiple points of contact. If there is a technical issue with an Elite system after installation, clients operating on the current version or one version prior can count on Elite's Support technicians to provide support, free of charge.

CONCLUSION

The technology curve will get steeper the longer you wait to upgrade. Waiting could mean a more disruptive upgrade process, as opposed to keeping a continuous improvement curve. Any way you look at it, catching up will become more expensive as the gap widens.

In the hyper-competitive market today where any advantage, however small, can mean the difference between success and failure, firms need to embrace change and strive for operational excellence. Complacent firms are falling behind and some will never be able to recover unless they reduce costs, create more efficient workflows, and maintain the processes that set them apart from their peers. Upgrading your system now can keep your firm on track to grow and thrive and be protected and be adaptable to whatever changes face the business world in the future.

To learn more about the latest release of Elite Enterprise or for a global list of office locations, call **323-642-5200** or visit elite.com.